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Approved For Release 2005/06/09 : CIA-RDP85T00875R001100010057-3

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## *Developments in Indochina*

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Until further notice, *Developments in Indochina* will be published once a week, on Wednesdays.

NORTH VIETNAM

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Hanoi and the PRG

Le Chan, North Vietnam's information chief in Paris [redacted] that the Viet Cong's Provisional Revolutionary Government (PRG) no longer is planning to establish a capital in South Vietnam. The PRG's goal, he said, is not to divide the South into two separate political "groups," but rather to have one "government of national concord" with a single capital. Chan rejected the view that the PRG decided not to set up a capital because it feared the South Vietnamese or US would bomb it. He said US air intervention in South Vietnam was now unlikely and that the South Vietnamese would be discouraged by Communist anti-aircraft installations.

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There has been considerable speculation that the PRG was on the verge of establishing a capital in some area in the South under Communist control. Northern Quang Tri Province and the Loc Ninh area north of Saigon have both been touted as possible locations. Rumors that such a declaration would be made reached a peak just before the fourth anniversary of the founding of the PRG on 6 June, when Liberation Radio announced that several Communist and third-world countries had sent ambassadors to an undisclosed location in northern South Vietnam to present their credentials to the PRG.

If the Vietnamese Communists ever did intend to set up a PRG capital, their failure to follow through is difficult to explain. They may simply have decided that they had no appropriate site or Hanoi may have passed the word that establishment of a capital in the South was not consistent with its contention that Vietnam is one country. There is also a possibility that the Communists backed off as a result of some developments in the Kissinger-Tho talks. At any rate, Le Chan says that Hanoi, which has never formally recognized the PRG, now has no intention of doing so, and the PRG may have to content itself with receiving diplomatic visitors at some undisclosed location in the South. [redacted]

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The Spring Harvest

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The spring rice crop has probably been completely harvested. There are no indications of the size of the harvest, but frequent North Vietnamese press reports of serious difficulties suggest that the crop may be considerably less than the record two million tons harvested in the spring of 1971. Several major rice-growing areas suffered from a combination of premature planting and transplanting, various diseases and insects, and adverse weather.

Weather may have been harsh during much of the growing season. January and February were unusually hot and dry, while early heavy rains occurred in May during the transition from the dry season to the monsoon. In Nam Ha Province, some 6,000 hectares of ripe riceland were reportedly flooded. The harvest, however, was somewhat earlier than usual, which may have spared some rice areas from rain damage that frequently occurs in June.

A poor harvest would have little immediate effect on North Vietnam's ability to feed its people. Food imports thus far this year have been at least as large as in previous years, and sufficient grain is probably on hand to last until the larger, autumn harvest. A poor harvest would, however, set back Hanoi's efforts to become self-sufficient in food and would slow the buildup of domestic stockpiles that would be needed should there be a repetition of the serious flooding during the 1971 rainy season.

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LAOSCommunist Excuses and Masquerades

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Hanoi appears ready to implement several ploys to keep some of its units in Laos once a deadline is set for withdrawal of foreign forces. Radio Hanoi recently announced that the Lao Communists have signed two separate economic assistance agreements, one for "surveys and construction of semi-durable projects servicing the finance and food branch," the other for assistance for transport, roads, and bridge construction.

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North Vietnamese units in less remote areas-- where International Control Commission teams might be active--may attempt to pass themselves off as Pathet Lao troops.

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A recent Lao Communist defector claims that North Vietnamese units in the hills of the northern Lao panhandle already have disguised themselves as Pathet Lao.

The evidence thus far is insufficient to allow a judgment on the number of troops the North Vietnamese might wish to retain in Laos after the deadline. Hanoi

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may choose to withdraw most, if not all, of its major main-force units, judging that their presence would be unnecessary once a coalition government is seated in Vientiane. The North Vietnamese, however, could choose to retain a number of their so-called provincial battalions in Laos to assist the Lao Communist forces. These battalions, composed largely of the same general tribal group that provides most of the recruits for Pathet Lao units, would be much easier to disguise than ethnic Vietnamese main-force units.

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